

Benin court throws out Bollore bid for rail plan

Benin's top court has rejected a bid by French group Bollore to recover control of a rail project to link Cotonou with Abidjan, a lawyer for a local firm told AFP.



Photo by Konstantin Planinski on Unsplash

The supreme court on Friday "rejected the suit filed by Bollore (Africa Logistics) and the Beninese state in their appeal," said Cyrille Djikui, lawyer for Beninese businessman Samuel Dossou Aworet, who is competing with Bollore.

Late Monday, Djikui told AFP that the so-called Echine Dorsale ("Backbone") project to build a line between the port cities in Benin and Ivory Coast was "imagined, conceived and put in place" by Dossou, the chairman of the Petrolin group.

Contacted by AFP, the Bollore group on Tuesday said it did not wish to make any immediate comment on the court ruling.

In 2008, Benin and Niger jointly launched a tender for building and managing a rail link between Cotonou, Benin's commercial hub, and Niger's capital Niamey.

The contract was awarded to Petrolin, a private Beninese firm.

Extending railway to a deep-water port

It proposed extending the railway to a deep-water port and the transport hubs at Parakou in Benin and Dosso in Niger, as well as an international airport located at Krake, on Benin's border with Nigeria.

But in 2013, President Yayi Boni's government took the project away from Petrolin and gave it to Bolloré, through its Beninrail company, a public-private partnership.

The authorities incorporated into the plan a scheme to link Cotonou to Abidjan by way of Niamey and Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso.



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"When I arrived in the government ... the plan had gone a long way. That's the reason I pushed things a bit," Gustave Sonon, former minister of public works, told AFP.

Sonon argued that the Beninese firm lacked the means to take on such a large project, a position that led to a long legal battle.

Dossou's wife, Claudine Afiavi Prudencio, stressed at the time that the businessman had personally launched a rail scheme and paid for preliminary studies out of his own pocket, according to a local paper.

Petrolin first won a court case on appeal in November 2015, forcing Bolloré and the state of Benin to go to the Supreme Court.

Source: AFP

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